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BIOGRAPHY OF MARTIN VAN BUREN.



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BIOGRAPHY OF MARTIN VAN BUREN.

[Extended and continued from the Cabinet & Talisman.]

[We are indebted to the author of the Biography of Mr. VAN BUREN, published in the Cabinet and Talisman for 1830, for the following Memoir. The sketch of Mr. V. B.'s professional career has been somewhat condensed, and that of his political life enlarged, and brought down to the present period. We present it to the public with the strongest conviction of its fidelity and accuracy. Nor is it less able, than accurate and just. We have not the least apprehension that it will not be read with avidity and interest; and, may we not hope, with candour? The attitude in which Mr. VAN BUREN now stands before the American community—the combined attempts of the Aristocracy and of Faction to depress and destroy him—the rising of the People in his favor, and the strong voice of the popular judgment in his vindication from the harsh and unfair assaults of his political enemies—and particularly his nomination, with unexampled unanimity and cordiality, by the delegated Democracy of the Nation, for the second office within the gift of the people—lend an additional interest to the particulars of a life, full of examples of a steadfast devotion to the great principles of the Democratic Party, identified with its glorious struggles, partaking of its depressions and associated with its triumphs, and destined to the still higher honors which a discerning People bestow upon eminent talents, distinguished services, moral worth, and political fidelity.—*Editor Argus.*]

MARTIN VAN BUREN was born at Kinderhook, in the county of Columbia, and state of New-York, on the 5th of December, 1782. He is the eldest son of Abraham Van Buren, an upright and intelligent man, whose virtuous conduct and amiable temper enabled him to pass through a long life, not only without an enemy, but without ever being involved in contention or controversy. His mother, a woman of excellent sense and pleasing manners, was twice married, Mr. Van Buren being her second husband. Both parents were exclusively of Dutch descent; their ancestors being among the most respectable of those emigrants from Holland, who established themselves, in the earliest period of our colonial history, in the ancient settlement of Kinderhook. They died at advanced ages; the father in 1814, the mother in 1818, but not before they had witnessed, and, for a long period, participated in, the prosperity of their soil.

The subject of this memoir displayed, in his boyhood, endowments so superior, that

his family resolved to educate him for the bar. He was accordingly placed, at the age of fourteen, in the office of Francis Sylvester, esq., then and still a much respected resident of Kinderhook, and at the time referred to, a practitioner of the law. Prior to the conclusion of his term of study, he spent about twelve months in the office of William P. Van Ness, then a distinguished lawyer and politician in the city of New-York.* His residence in that city afforded Mr. Van Buren opportunities of instruction and improvement, superior to any that he had before enjoyed; and as he was both eager in pursuing, and apt in acquiring knowledge, he employed these advantages with diligence and profit.

In November, 1803, he was licensed as an attorney of the Supreme Court, and immediately thereafter commenced professional business in his native village, in connexion with a half brother, considerably his senior. At the next term of the county courts, he was admitted as attorney and counsellor, and thus enrolled in the Columbia bar, then numbering among its members several of the first men in the state; but the field was not fairly spread before him until his admission as counsellor in the Supreme Court, which took place in February, 1807.

He had always aspired to distinction at the bar; but though he had within him not only the desire, but the elements of success, he was obliged to force his way through an opposition at once powerful and peculiar. The political dissensions which then agitated the Union, were carried, in Columbia county, to the greatest extremities. The title to a large portion of the soil was vested in a few ancient families, the founders of which had been endowed, during the colonial government, with a species of baronial prerogative. The members of these families were generally fede-

* This gentleman having afterwards held the office of District Judge of the United States for the southern district of New-York, is some times confounded with William W. Van Ness, for many years a Judge of the Supreme Court of the State—a mistake which happens the more readily, from their being both natives of Columbia county, and both greatly distinguished by their talents and their connexion with political affairs, though they belonged, the former to the republican, and the latter to the federal party.

ralists, and as they carried with them most of the wealthy freeholders, and the great mass of the merchants and professional men, they were enabled to maintain, for many years, an uninterrupted ascendancy in the county. Their reign was not that of toleration or liberality; on the contrary, the federalists of Columbia, partly perhaps from the spirited and inflexible character of their opponents, were among the most decided and thorough going partizans in the state. Mr. Van Buren was an object, with them, of particular hostility. He was a plebeian and a democrat; he was destitute of fortune and in need of patronage; and yet he would neither worship at the shrine of wealth, nor court the favor of the powerful—worse than all—he possessed talents, and was not afraid to exert them, in the face, and to the prejudice, of his political enemies. It was therefore thought to be a matter of interest, if not of duty, to keep him in the shade; and nothing was omitted that seemed likely to produce such a result.

Undismayed by persecution, unruffled by the petty arts of loquacity and slander, and overleaping the obstacles by which his progress was obstructed, Mr. Van Buren pressed forward in the race before him. "He that seeketh to be eminent amongst able men," says Lord Bacon, "hath a hard task." That task, and more than that, Mr. Van Buren undertook, for he strove not only for eminence, but mastery. There was a noble daring in the very attempt to cope with these formidable adversaries, which would almost have compensated for the want of success; but by unremitting attention to business, by diligent preparation, and by the utmost exertion of his powers, such an issue was prevented. His faculties, naturally acute, were not only sharpened by these conflicts, but invigorated and rapidly enlarged; and it was not long before he was enabled to contend on high and equal ground, with the ablest of the group. This, after the promotion of Judge W. W. Van Ness, was Elisha Williams, the most celebrated jury lawyer in the state, and probably in the Union, then in the prime of manhood, and nearly at the zenith of his fame.

In 1809, Mr. Van Buren removed to the city of Hudson, which was also the residence of Mr. Williams; and from that time they divided, and for many years continued to divide, the professional business of the county. They stood also at the head of the political parties to which they were respectively attached.

The writer has often witnessed, in other

places, displays of great forensic talent; but he has never seen causes tried with any thing like the zeal, the skill, or the effect, which were always exhibited at a Columbia circuit, during the period referred to. A trial there was an intellectual combat of the highest order; the antagonists were stimulated, not only by professional duty and the love of fame, but by a rivalry political and personal, which never suffered intermission or decline. This rivalry to which we have alluded, continued for more than ten years; and if time and space permitted, it would be interesting, at least to the professional reader, to develop more fully than we can now do, the characters of the parties, and the history of their conflicts.

In the mean time, Mr. Van Buren had followed his distinguished rival to the higher courts, and to the tribunal of the last resort. He there encountered the first talents in the state, and with such success, that on the republicans regaining their ascendancy, he was appointed, in February, 1815, Attorney-General of the state, in the room of Abraham Van Vechten, then equally eminent for political sagacity and professional reputation, but now revered and loved as the father of the New-York bar. The duties of this office, and the extension of his practice, induced Mr. Van Buren, in the following year, to change his residence from Hudson to Albany. From this time until his retirement, he was deservedly ranked with those distinguished civilians, to whom, in connexion with her judiciary, the state owes so large a portion of her renown. Amongst such competitors, it was impossible to acquire, still more so to maintain, a factitious reputation. Mr. Van Buren's was based on materials the most durable. Gifted with a large share of good sense, with a quickness of apprehension almost intuitive, with a nice discrimination, and with great accuracy of judgment, and illustrating these qualities by powers of reasoning and oratory rarely surpassed, he was peculiarly qualified for the discussion of those varied and complicated questions of law and of fact, which are so often presented for decision in our higher tribunals. It was accordingly in the management of important cases in the superior courts, that his most successful efforts as an advocate were made. His talents and reputation soon secured to him an extensive and lucrative business, which would doubtless have increased to the highest amount known to the American bar, if his labors in his profession had not been frequently interrupted, and at length finally

suspended, by his attention to political concerns.

Whether before a jury, or at bar, he particularly excelled in the opening of his subject. The facts out of which arose the questions for discussion, the nature of those questions, and the mode in which he intended to treat them, were always stated with great clearness and address. In the exposition of his argument, he was usually copious and diffusive, presenting his case in all its lights, and bringing to bear upon it every consideration which could tend to elucidate its merits or to cover its defects. His style and manner were judiciously adapted to the character of his subject, and of his hearers; sometimes direct and argumentative, and at others discursive and impassioned; but even in the management of the most abstruse legal topics, he was able by the perspicuity of his statements, the aptness of his illustrations, the vivacity and force of his tone and gesture, and the felicity of his whole manner, to excite and to retain the undivided attention of all classes of his auditors.

No one was better qualified to speak with ability and effect, upon little, or without any preparation; but no one could be more careful or laborious in his preparatory studies. We mention this for the purpose of reminding the junior members of the bar, that if they would emulate and equal the successful career we have delineated, they must rely not on genius alone, nor on general knowledge or a diversified experience, but on the surer aids to be derived from a perfect acquaintance with their subject, and a careful premeditation of what they are to say.

The public life and services of Mr. Van Buren, to which we shall now direct the attention of our readers, demand a fuller notice than that bestowed on his professional career. It must, however, necessarily be brief; for to bring them out, in their just proportions, would require a volume, and would lead to to discussions foreign to this place. His first connexion with political affairs was in the great contest which preceded the civil revolution of 1801. His father, a whig in the revolution, and an anti-federalist of 1788, was among the earliest supporters of Mr. Jefferson. The son, then a law student at Kinderhook, espoused with great warmth the same principles; but his course was emphatically his own. It was the result of a decided conviction, that the conduct and doctrines of the men in power, were not only repugnant to the spirit of the constitution, but subversive of the rights of the people, and calculated to

lead to an aristocratic government. The strength and integrity of these convictions were severely tested. The gentleman in whose office he was a student was a high-toned federalist; so was a near and much loved relative, his earliest patron. A majority of the inhabitants, including nearly all the wealthy families, and most if not all his youthful associates, belonged to the same party, and that party then had the ascendancy, not only in his own town, but in the county, the state, and the Union. Aware of his superior endowments, and anxious to save him from what was deemed by many of his friends a fatal, if not a criminal heresy, great exertions were made to attach him to the dominant party. Every motive which could operate on the mind of an ardent and ambitious young man, was held out to him, but without success. He persisted in maintaining the principles he had espoused, and he spared no pains to inculcate them upon others, especially by animated addresses at the meetings of the people. His devotion, thus early, to the popular cause, though it exposed him to the implacable hostility of the federalists, secured for him the confidence and affections of the democracy of the town, and soon made him so conspicuous in his county, that in the latter part of 1800 or beginning of 1801, when only in his eighteenth or nineteenth year, he was one of her representatives in a republican convention composed of delegates from the counties of Rensselaer and Columbia, and held for the purpose of nominating a candidate for the house of representatives. On that occasion, he assisted the veteran politicians, with whom he was associated, in preparing an address to the electors. During the residue of his minority, he was in the habit of representing the republicans of his town in the county conventions, and of taking as active and efficient a part in the political contests of the day, as any of his seniors.

His first appearance as an elector, was in the spring of 1804, when, in common with the great mass of the party in which he had been bred, he supported Morgan Lewis for governor of New-York in opposition to Aaron Burr. Here again his integrity and independence were strikingly exemplified. Mr. Van Ness, with whom he had recently been a student, was the intimate friend of Col. Burr; and Mr. Van Buren himself, whilst a resident in the city of New-York, had received many flattering attentions from that gentleman. Several of the leading republicans of Columbia county, including some of Mr. Van Buren's

earliest friends, were among the warmest supporters of Col. Burr. Yet Mr. Van Buren took a decided stand against Col. Burr, on the ground that he was the candidate of the party opposed to Mr. Jefferson, and to the democracy of the state. His course on this occasion subjected him to some temporary antipathies; but its wisdom and propriety were sanctioned by the judgment of the people, and at the present day, will hardly be called in question.

In 1807 the democratic party was again divided between Lewis and Tompkins, and Mr. Van Buren, again acting in unison with the majority, was among the most decided supporters of the latter. In 1808, he was appointed Surrogate of the county, an office which he held until February, 1813, when the federal party having acquired the ascendancy in that branch of the legislature which controlled the appointing power, he was promptly removed.

From the moment when, in early youth, he espoused the democratic principle, he never wavered in his course. Mr. Jefferson's administration received his uniform support; though in the ardor of youthful patriotism, he sometimes wished for a more decided policy towards the invaders of our neutral rights. During the whole period of the British encroachments, he was among those who labored to awaken, in our councils and people, a spirit of indignation and resistance. The embargo, and other restrictive measures adopted by congress, met his decided approbation; and were frequently vindicated by him in popular addresses, and on other occasions. In the dark days which followed these measures, he neither apostatized, nor flinched, nor doubted. His support of the government was not merely active, but zealous; nor was his the zeal of ordinary men. It absorbed his whole soul; it led to untiring exertion; it was exhibited on all occasions, and under all circumstances. Neither the contumely of inflated wealth, nor the opposition of invidious talent, nor the weekly revilings of a licentious press, nor a succession of defeats in his own county, could induce him to conceal or to modify his political sentiments, or to temporize in his policy or conduct.

The influence of such principles, accompanied by talents like those of Mr. Van Buren, was not to be circumscribed within the limits of a single county. It accordingly extended in the same proportion with his professional reputation; and as early as 1811, we find him taking the lead in a meeting held at the seat of government, and com-

posed chiefly of the democratic members of the legislature. In 1811, he took great interest in the question of the renewal of the United States Bank. In connexion with the venerable George Clinton and other leading members of the party in this state, he strenuously opposed the rechartering of that institution. After congress had decided this question, a powerful association was formed, for the purpose of procuring from the state legislature a charter for the Bank of America, to be established in the city of New-York, with a capital (enormous for a local bank) of \$6,000,000. As the democracy of the state, with but few exceptions, considered this application a sort of substitute for the renewal of the national bank, they took strong ground against it. Mr. Van Buren was one of its most prominent opponents. The republicans of his county were convened on the subject. He delivered to them a powerful speech against the proposed application, which was denounced in a series of resolutions prepared by him and adopted by the meeting, as a most dangerous and anti-republican measure. His sentiments on the main question, and his belief that improper means had been resorted to by the agents of the bank, conspired to recommend to his approbation and support, the prorogation of the legislature by Governor Tompkins, in April, 1812; and he accordingly sustained that energetic measure by the active exertion of his influence and talents. At this juncture he was, for the first time, put in nomination for an elective office—that of state senator for the then middle district. A more violent struggle was hardly ever known in the state; Mr. Van Buren succeeded, but by a majority of less than two hundred out of twenty thousand votes.

He took his seat in the senate in November, 1812, at the meeting held for the choice of presidential electors. The republican members of the legislature having, in the preceding summer, nominated De Witt Clinton for president, in opposition to Mr. Madison, then a candidate for re-election, and that nomination having been tendered to, and accepted by Mr. Clinton, Mr. Van Buren thought it due to consistency and good faith, to support electors friendly to that gentleman. He was also prompted to do so by an impression, that the measures of the existing administration were not sufficiently decisive and energetic, and by a sincere and confident belief that Mr. Clinton, though supported by the opponents of the war, would yet, if elected, pursue

that contest with more vigour and success than his amiable and enlightened competitor. Besides—Mr. Van Buren had been bred in the political sentiments of George Clinton, and on the death of that illustrious patriot, had naturally transferred much of his respect for the name, principles and character of the uncle, to his distinguished nephew, who, up to that period had been generally regarded as a pillar of the democratic party. In these views a majority of the republicans in each branch of the legislature concurred; and Mr. Clinton accordingly received the vote of New-York. Mr. Van Buren, however, uniformly declared that he would abide by the decision of the majority; and that he would support to the end, every measure of the government, by whomsoever it might be administered, which was calculated to bring the war—a measure which he had advocated in advance, and constantly defended—to a successful result. In conformity with these principles, he took a leading part in the winter of 1813, in the nomination of Gov. Tompkins, whose patriotism had identified him with the history of the country, and whose re-election seemed essential to the prosecution of the war, if not to the existence of the government. On this occasion he wrote the address to the electors of the state, issued by the republican members of the legislature—an elaborate and eloquent production, in which the duty of sustaining the administration in the prosecution of the war, was enforced by every motive that could reach the hearts, or call out the energies of the people. The extracts from this address which have recently been laid before the public, will have enabled them to test the justice of this remark. It was widely circulated, and produced the desired effect.

In the election of April, 1813, Mr. Clinton, and many of his friends, supported the candidate of the opposition; and from this point a separation ensued between that distinguished statesman and Mr. Van Buren, which, as to all political matters, continued ever after.

The sessions of 1813 and 14, were peculiarly trying. The federalists then had the control in the assembly, and were violent and uniform in their opposition to the war and to its supporters. A majority of the senators, with Van Buren and his able coadjutors, Nathan Sanford and Erastus Root, at their head, were equally inflexible in their support of the government. They passed many bills of patriotic character, which were rejected by the other branch. This led to several public

conferences, in which the points in controversy—involving not only the particular measures in dispute, but the justice and expediency of the war, and the conduct and merits of the national administration—were debated at large, in the presence of the two houses, by committees chosen on the part of each, and with all the energy and ardor which the spirit of the times was calculated to inspire. These conferences, from the nature of their subjects, the solemnity with which they were conducted, and the crowded and excited auditories that attended them, presented opportunities for the display of popular eloquence, almost rivalling in dignity and interest, the assemblies of ancient Greece. In all of them, Mr. Van Buren was a principal speaker on the part of the senate, and by his readiness and dexterity in debate, his powerful reasoning, and his patriotic defence of the government and its measures, commanded great applause. On one occasion in particular, he delivered a speech of such eloquence and power, that immediately after the termination of the debate, a committee was appointed by the republicans of Albany—who, in great numbers, had attended in the galleries—to present him the thanks of their constituents, and to procure a copy of the speech for publication. This request, however, could not be complied with, as the speech had been delivered without even the usual preparative of short notes; and Mr. Van Buren, who was then in feeble health, had neither time nor strength to write it out.

In September 1814, the legislature was convoked by the Executive, to deliberate on the alarming crisis then existing. The republicans had then regained their control in both branches, and various measures were adopted with the express view of aiding the national administration, in the prosecution of the war. Of these, in addition to acts making appropriations of money, the most prominent were the acts “to authorise the raising of troops for the defence of the state,” and to “encourage privateering associations.”—These bills were each supported by Mr. Van Buren; but the first and most important—which was known among its friends as the “classification,” and among its enemies as the “conscription” bill, and which very much resembled the classification bill subsequently reported to congress by Mr. Monroe—was peculiarly his measure, it having been matured and introduced by him. They were assailed by the opposition, both in and out of the legislature, with unwonted violence. In the council of revision, Chancellor Kent delivered written opinions, denouncing them as

inconsistent with the spirit of the constitution, and the public good. Those opinions, though overruled by the other members of the council, were published in the newspapers and extensively circulated; and from the high reputation of their learned and estimable author, they were eminently calculated to excite doubts as to the validity of the laws, and to impair public confidence in those who enacted them.

In this state of things, Col. Young, then speaker of the assembly, and the principal champion in that house, of the measures thus impugned, undertook their defence, and especially that of the Classification law, in a series of letters, written with great ability, and addressed to the Chancellor, under the signature of *Juris Consultus*. They were answered by *Amicus Curiae*, (supposed to be the Chancellor himself,) who was replied to by Mr. Van Buren, in four numbers, under the signature of *Amicus Juris Consultus*. In the first of these papers, he took a general view of the several topics connected with the controversy; the others were devoted to a minute examination of the various objections made by the Chancellor, and by *Amicus Curiae*, for the act encouraging privateering associations. This controversy, as conducted by all the parties, was one of the ablest which grew out of the last war. Mr. Van Buren's share of it, which was distinguished by great ability and research, soon became known among his political friends, and contributed in no small degree, to his appointment as Attorney-General, which took place in the February following. He was soon after appointed by the legislature, a Regent of the University.

In 1816, he was re-elected to the Senate, and remained in that body until 1820, when his term of service expired. From the commencement to the close of his legislative career, he was found among the supporters of every measure connected with the great interests of the state. He was particularly distinguished as a leading and most efficient advocate of those great plans of public improvement which have since conferred, not alone on the state by which they have been executed, but on the age in which we live, such imperishable honor.

The next step in Mr. Van Buren's progress, places him on higher ground than any he has yet occupied. We have seen him one of the most active and conspicuous politicians in his native state; we are now to regard him as the acknowledged rival, in influence and renown, of the most celebrated of her sons—De Witt Clinton. In March, 1817, that gen-

tleman was nominated by the republican convention as a candidate to succeed Gov. Tompkins, who had been chosen Vice-President of the United States. Mr. Van Buren was one of the minority in this convention, though in accordance with the usages and feelings appropriate to such occasions, he acquiesced in the result. Mr. Clinton was subsequently elected, almost without opposition, but—whether with, or without cause, we stop not to inquire—gave little satisfaction to the democracy of the state. A division of the party soon after took place; the great mass, with Mr. Van Buren in their number, opposed his re-election, and from this time until the death of Governor Clinton, these distinguished citizens stood at the head of the great political parties of New-York. Mr. Van Buren, the commencement of this era was Attorney-General of the state, but the council of appointment, at whose pleasure the office was held, was devoted to Mr. Clinton. This, however, did not prevent him from pursuing with frankness and decision, the course which his judgment had prescribed; though he was aware that the loss of office would inevitably follow; and he was accordingly removed in July, 1819. Opposition to Mr. Clinton was the only cause assigned for this measure, which was to Mr. Van Buren one of the most fortunate events in his public life. It commended him more than ever to the confidence and affections of the firm party men, who remembered his uniform adherence to the republican cause, and above all, his vigorous support of the government, at the most trying period of the war. It also largely contributed to the peculiar result of the election in 1820, when the opponents of Governor Clinton, they failed in preventing his re-election, carried both branches of the legislature. Restoration to the office of Attorney-General was tendered to Mr. Van Buren by his political friends, but being declined by him, he was appointed in February 1821, a senator in the congress of the United States.

In the interval between that appointment and the next congress, a convention was held to amend the constitution of the state. Mr. Van Buren, who had warmly advocated this measure, especially with a view to the extension of the right of suffrage, was unexpectedly returned to it, though a resident of Albany, by the republican electors of Otsego, as a member from that county.

Many venerable and distinguished men, together with most of the active talent of the state, were found in this convention. It was therefore, a high compliment—though it

only simple truth—to say, that in all the deliberations of this enlightened assembly, Mr. Van Buren, if not first, was certainly one of the foremost. His speeches on the various questions submitted to the convention, are published in the report of its proceedings, and are among the ablest in the volume. They are particularly worthy of note, for the clear and comprehensive manner in which they discuss the great principles of government, and for their soundness, moderation and justice.—But it is not the mere display of talent or wisdom, that illustrates this portion of Mr. Van Buren's history. His conduct in the convention is entitled to other, and we doubt not posterity will deem it higher, praise—the praise which belongs to independence, magnanimity and virtue. He entered it under circumstances most flattering to his pride—the acknowledgment of a leader of a triumphant majority; he was expelled before the termination of the session, either to assent to a course of proceeding in relation to the judiciary establishments, which he deemed unequalled for and improper, or to separate from some of the oldest and most valued of his friends. He chose, without hesitation or misgiving, the latter alternative, and was placed, as he foresaw would be the consequence, in the ranks of the minority. His conduct, on this occasion, was so evidently the result of principle, that those of his party who differed from him in opinion, honored him the more for his firmness and integrity—the separation it produced, was therefore confined to the questions which occasioned it.*

* The following extract from a speech of Mr. Van Buren upon one of the measures above referred to, will not only illustrate this part of his public conduct, but will give some idea of his manner in debate.

"The matter therefore being clear, that the only effect of the amendment would be to turn out of office the present incumbents, [the Judges of the Supreme Court,] he submitted to the Convention whether it would be either just or wise to do so. He submitted it, he said, particularly to that portion of the Convention, who would be held responsible for its doings—and who would in a political point of view, be the chief sufferers by a failure of the ratification of their proceedings by the people. He warned them to reflect seriously on this most interesting matter. He directed their attention to the never ending feuds and controversies which would inevitably grow out of the amendments adopted by the Convention. He knew well, he said, how apt, men in their situation—beaten by discussions, and sometimes pressed by indiscreet friends—were to suffer their feelings to be excited, and to lead them into measures which their sober judgments would condemn. It was their duty to rise superior to all such feelings. He asked them to reflect for a moment, and then answer him, whether, when they left home, they ever heard the least intimation from their

He took his seat in the Senate of the United States in December, 1821. In 1827 he was re-elected to the same station. To describe the share taken by him in the proceedings of the Senate, would be to copy the journals of that body for the seven years during which he was a member. Before the end of the first session, he had established, in an assembly containing such men as Rufus King and William Pinckney, a reputation of the highest grade, which was successfully maintained in after years.

It has often been demonstrated, that the sarcastic remark of Mr. Burke, "that lawyers are not at home in legislative assemblies," has no application to the American bar. Of this, Mr. Van Buren furnishes a new and signal proof. In the Senate of New-York, he showed himself an able and sagacious legislator; in the Senate of the United States, that instead of amending the Constitution upon general principles, they were to descend to pulling down obnoxious officers through the medium of the Convention; and he asked them whether they were not sensible of the great danger of surprising the public at this advanced stage of the session, when the greatest uneasiness already prevailed, by a measure so unexpected. There was, he said, no necessity for, or propriety in, this measure. They had already thrown wide open the doors of approach to unworthy incumbents. They had altered the impeaching power, from two-thirds to a bare majority. They had provided also that the chancellor and judges should be removable by the vote of two-thirds of one branch, and a bare majority of the other. The judicial officer who could not be reached in either of those ways, ought not to be touched. There were therefore no public reasons for the measure, and it not, then why are we to adopt it? Certainly not from personal feelings. If personal feelings could or ought to influence us against the individual who would probably be most affected by the adoption of this amendment, [Judge W. W. Van Ness] Mr. Van Buren supposed that he above all others, would be excused for indulging them. He could with truth say, that he had through his whole life been assailed from that quarter, with hostility, political, professional and personal—hostility which had been the most keen, active and unyielding. But sir, said he, am I on that account, to avail myself of my situation as a representative of the people, sent here to make a constitution for them and their posterity, and to indulge my individual resentments in the prostration of my private and political adversary? He hoped it was unnecessary for him to say, that he should forever despise himself if he could be capable of such conduct. He also hoped that that sentiment was not confined to himself alone, and that the Convention would not ruin its character and credit, by proceeding to such extremities."—[*Carter and Stone's Debates of the Convention*, p. 535.

The conduct of Mr. Van Buren on this occasion, and on the nomination of Mr. CLAY as Secretary of State, furnishes a conclusive refutation to the charge of "proscription" recently made by the latter, in the United States Senate, and is strikingly contrasted with his course on the occasion referred to.

States, his sphere of action was not only greatly extended, but the subjects of deliberation proportionably difficult and complicated; yet here, also, he displayed a reach and comprehension of intellect, and a degree of practical wisdom and enlightened forecast which entitle him to the appellation and the honors of a statesman. As a ready and successful debater, he had no superior. Several of his speeches, particularly those in favor of the bill abolishing imprisonment for debt, and in support of the law making provision for the officers and soldiers of the revolution, have been ranked among the finest specimens of eloquence ever heard in the Senate. Those on the Panama mission, on the organization of the judiciary, and on the right of the Vice-President to control the freedom of debate, were conspicuous for luminous discussion, and for sound views of constitutional policy. Reports of some of them have been published, but "though the massive trunk of sentiment remains," the "blossoms of elocution," in each case, and the fruits of genius in most of them, "have dropped away."^{*} This must be said of every attempt to perpetuate his speeches, whether at the bar or in the Senate. His utterance is so rapid, that no short hand writer can follow him with accuracy; and he has rarely ever submitted to the drudgery of writing out a speech. Nor, indeed, is he capable, by any after labor, of doing justice to his own efforts; for his brilliant passages are so entirely extemporaneous, that they can neither be repeated by others nor recalled by himself.

The course pursued by Mr. Van Buren as a senator, both in respect to the foreign policy of the nation, and to our domestic concerns, was in perfect harmony with the doctrines he had previously maintained. One of his first efforts was, to revive the distinctive principles of the party in which he had been bred, and from which, as he supposed, Mr. Monroe's administration, especially during its second term, had considerably swerved. Although the exertions made by him to effect this end, were not very successful, they attracted general attention, and were decidedly approved by the democracy of the union.

He also took a leading part in the presidential election of 1824, and the canvass which preceded it. Believing the election of Mr. Crawford more likely, at that period, to bring back the government to the Jeffersonian policy, than that of any of his competitors, he gave to that gentleman his vigorous support. His perseverance, under the most

adverse circumstances, in the support of that upright and persecuted citizen, is well known; as is also the overwhelming defeat, both in his own state, and in the union, which terminated the contest.

In that catastrophe, his enemies,—ignorant or forgetful of the recuperative power of talents and integrity—vainly imagined, they saw the downfall, if not the end, of his influence and success; but before another year had elapsed, he occupied a position more elevated than ever. The first step toward that position, was the wise determination to take no part in the decision by the House of Representatives—a resolution adopted by the friends of Mr. Crawford, with the double motive of retaining their usefulness after the contest should be decided, and of preserving themselves from the charge of coalescing with their opponents. After the election, Mr. Van Buren advised his friends at home to abstain from all acts of hostility towards Mr. Adams; to give him a fair trial, and to judge of his administration by his acts. His course in the Senate was governed by the same principles; and it was not until the great question of the Panama mission that he found occasion to depart from it. His opposition to that measure; the interesting considerations connected with it; and the judgment which the people have pronounced on the conduct of those who supported and those who opposed it; are well known. It was after taking this stand, an act which drew upon him the marked hostility of Mr. Adams's Cabinet, and the open denunciations of their supporters, that he was re-elected to the Senate, by the legislature of New York. His connexion with the great contest of 1828, and his efficient instrumentality in bringing about that triumphant result, which, to use his own language, "while it infused fresh vigor into our political system, and added new beauties to the republican character, once more refuted the odious imputation that Republics are ungrateful," need not be rehearsed.

With the electors of president and vice-president for the state of New-York, a governor of the state was also to be chosen, to succeed the distinguished and lamented Clinton. Yielding to the pressing demand of the republicans of New-York, Mr. Van Buren consented to become a candidate for the office, and was subsequently elected.

This event made it necessary that he should retire from the Senate of the United States, and he accordingly resigned his seat in the body in January, 1829.

Before we follow him to the chief mag-

^{*} Johnson.

tracy of his native state, it will be proper to notice two or three points connected with his services in the Senate, to which no reference has yet been made. During the whole period of those services, the nation was agitated by discussions on bills for regulating the tariff, and for constructing internal improvements. As a great majority of the people of New-York, were decidedly in favor of the protective system, and of the bills imposing additional duties passed in 1824 and 1828, Mr. Van Buren's votes on these bills were governed by their wishes and instructions—it being with him a cardinal maxim, that the representative is bound to express the sentiments of his constituents, whenever those sentiments can be clearly ascertained. But whilst he was always ready to aid in the protection of the manufacturing interest, by advocating the adoption of all necessary and reasonable measures, he was not prepared to build up that interest at the expense of others equally important to the well-being of the nation. Deeply sensible that the union of the states could only be kept up, by the constant exercise of that spirit of concession and compromise in which it was formed, he earnestly inculcated upon the representatives of the manufacturing states, the importance of limiting their demands to the lowest practicable point; the mischiefs to be apprehended, both in a pecuniary and national point of view, from extravagant and oppressive duties; and the benefits to be derived from a reduction of the revenue to an amount barely sufficient to pay the national debt, and carry on an economical government. The wise and liberal sentiments entertained by him in this respect, were made, not unfrequently, the topics of accusation in his own state. In 1827, these accusations increased to such an extent, that he availed himself of the opportunity afforded him by a public meeting held in Albany on the subject of the then proposed Harrisburgh convention, to lay before that meeting, in a speech of considerable length, his general views on the whole subject, as well as an explanation of the course he had pursued, whilst a member of the senate, on the particular bills which had come before that body. This speech, which was afterwards published, had the effect of satisfying the people of New-York in regard to the course of the senator, and made it, but it had also a tendency to moderate the high tariff sentiments of some of his constituents. The recent history of the tariff, and above all the bill just passed for the reduction of the duties, have fully vindicated the wisdom, foresight and

patriotism of Mr. Van Buren's course in relation to this most important and difficult subject.

In regard to internal improvements, Mr. Van Buren, had always but one opinion, viz : that it was not intended by the framers of the constitution to confer on Congress the power of constructing them; and that the power, if exercised at all, ought to be sacredly confined to objects of a strictly national character. With perhaps a single exception, his votes in the Senate, were in strict accordance with these views. The case alluded to, as constituting a possible exception, is thus stated by himself. "Mr. Van Buren is by no means certain, that in this respect, he himself has been altogether without fault. At the very first session after he came into the Senate, the knowledge of the perpetual drain that the Cumberland road was destined to prove upon the public treasury, unless some means were taken to prevent it, and a sincere desire to go at all times, as far as he could consistently with the constitution, to aid in the improvement, and promote the prosperity, of the western country, had induced him, without full examination, to vote for a provision, authorizing the collection of toll on this road. The affair of the Cumberland road, in respect to its reference to the constitutional powers of this government, is a matter entirely *sui generis*. It was authorised during the administration of Mr. Jefferson, grew out of the disposition of the territory of the United States, and had the consent of the states through which it passed. He has never heard an explanation of the subject, (although it has been a matter of constant reference,) that has been satisfactory to his mind. All he can say, is, that if the question were again presented to him he would vote against it; and that his regret for having done otherwise, would be greater, had not Mr. Monroe, much to his credit, put his veto upon the bill; and were it not the only vote, in the course of a seven years' service, which the most fastidious critic can torture into an inconsistency with the principles which Mr. V. B. professed to maintain, and in the justice of which, he is every day more and more confirmed."*

Mr. Van Buren entered upon the office of Governor of New-York, on the first of January, 1829, and administered the government until the 12th of March following, when he resigned, in consequence of his appointment as Secretary of State of the United States. Of the ability

* Note C. to Mr. Van Buren's speech in relation to the right of the Vice-President to call to order, &c. delivered in 1828.

and uprightness with which he discharged the duties of the chief magistracy, there is high and honorable proof. Resolutions expressive of the "highest respect for his virtues and talents," and tendering to him the congratulations of the representatives of the people, with "their earnest wish that he might enjoy a full measure of happiness and prosperity in the new sphere of public duty to which he was about to be removed," were unanimously passed by both branches of the state legislature, though a considerable portion of each house belonged to the party opposed to his election. The like sentiments were expressed, in terms still more flattering and affectionate, by the republican members, who transmitted him a communication on the eve of his departure for Washington, in which, after expressing "their attachment to his person, their respect for his character, and their regret at the separation that was about to take place," they tendered him their acknowledgements, "for the numerous and important services which he had rendered to the state, particularly in sustaining those political principles which they believed to be most intimately blended with its highest and dearest interests." These proceedings, in connexion with those had during the last winter, may be taken as an index of the estimation in which he is held by the people of his native state, and of the character of their feelings towards him.

Immediately after his resignation as Governor of New-York, he repaired to the post assigned him by the President.

The qualities of his mind, temper and manners, were peculiarly adapted to the duties of a cabinet minister, and more especially to those of the state department. Whilst he occupied this station, he showed himself a safe constitutional adviser, by recommending on all occasions, a strict and scrupulous adherence to the terms of the constitution—a liberal regard to the interests of each portion of the Union—a sincere deference to the independence and sovereignty of the states, wherever those attributes remained to them—an honest, vigilant and frugal administration at home—and a watchful and provident attention to our concerns with foreign nations. The management of those concerns, so far as it devolved on him, was precisely what it should have been. His demeanor towards the agents of foreign powers, was on all occasions frank, conciliatory, and dignified; his despatches contained nothing rhetorical, offensive or imprudent; the affairs to which they related were discussed in a plain business-like manner; our own views and claims

were clearly stated, and when founded on truth and justice, inflexibly maintained; the pretensions of our opponents were candidly considered; and in accordance with the character and policy of the President, every effort was made to conduct our diplomatic arrangements in the spirit of sincerity and justice. The success which attended his labors as Secretary of State, is too well known to need to be repeated.

Mr. Van Buren held the office of Secretary of State, until June 1831, when he retired from that important and honorable trust which he had voluntarily resigned in the preceding April. The reasons which induced him to take this step, were of the purest and most elevated character. He believed that the best interests of the republic were identified with the full and successful development of the principles which led to the election of Gen. Jackson; he saw that the confidence of the President, though indispensable to his usefulness in the cabinet, was yet made the ground of open accusation and insidious attack; he was aware that envy and ambition in their efforts to injure *him*, were likely to embarrass, if not to thwart the measures of the government; and he knew that so long as *he* maintained a position so prominent and commanding, the patriotic designs of the Executive would be counteracted, not only by the regular opposition, but by the more dangerous hostility of some who pretended to be his friends. Under these circumstances, he resolved to abandon the advantages of that position; and, by a voluntary sacrifice of the influence and prospects which belonged to it, to relieve the administration from the difficulties created by enmity towards him. When the mists of prejudice which hang over the page of recent history, shall have been cleared away, this act will stand out in the lustre of personal magnanimity and public virtue.

The reluctant assent of Gen. Jackson to the resignation of Mr. Van Buren, was accompanied by a warm testimonial of unlimited confidence in his abilities and integrity. A further proof was soon after given of this confidence, in the appointment of Mr. Van Buren as minister to Great Britain. In making this appointment, the President was mainly influenced by the belief that Mr. Van Buren would be more likely than any one he could select, to negotiate a satisfactory adjustment of the delicate and dangerous questions concerning blockades, impregnable harbors and the right of search, which occasioned the late war with Great Britain, and which yet remained undisposed of. The President justly thought

the amicable settlement of these questions an object of deep interest, not only to the two nations, but to the world; and that it, therefore, demanded the best talents of the country. He also supposed that Mr. Van Buren, from his intimate knowledge of our relations with the several powers of Europe, would be able to render essential aid to our ministers on that continent; and that he might, in various other ways, promote the public interest, during his residence at London. Mr. Van Buren felt the whole force of these considerations, and he was, moreover, very willing to withdraw, for the usual period of a foreign mission, from the turmoil of party. He therefore readily complied with the wishes of the president, by accepting the appointment—though most of his political and personal friends were exceedingly averse to it, on the ground that his absence from the country would materially impair his political prospects at home. This being the principal motive of their objections, he did not think them sufficiently important to deter him from engaging in a service, which promised, if successful, to be not less useful to his country than honorable to himself. He landed in England in September 1831, and was soon after received at court with distinguished favor. His appointment, however, remained to be confirmed by the senate. It was submitted to that body in December following, and after various postponements was finally negatived, by the casting vote of the vice-president, on the 26th of January, 1832. In consequence of this event, Mr. Van Buren was immediately recalled, and has recently landed on his natal soil. Of the reasons assigned for his rejection, it can not, in this place, be necessary to speak, farther than to remark, that if any reliance can be placed on repeated and spontaneous expressions of the public voice—and in matters of this sort the people never err—then were those reasons utterly insufficient. The popular feeling excited by the conduct of the senate, has been further exemplified in his recent nomination for the vice-presidency—an event, which, when he left the country, he neither looked for nor desired. The heterogenous interests which were combined to accomplish his defeat in the senate, are again united in opposing his re-election, but as the question now at issue, is not his re-election, but his appointment to be decided by the yeomanry of the country, we have no fears as to the result.

We have thus presented a rapid sketch of the professional and public life of MARTIN VAN BUREN. It illustrates in a manner the most impressive, one of the happiest princi-

ples of our excellent frame of government—its tendency to draw out and foster talent and integrity, and to secure to them, in spite of every thing by which their progress may be impeded, the honors they deserve. We have seen that he owed nothing to birth or ancestry—nothing to property or patronage. And though like others of our public men, he was greatly indebted to the press of his own party, for occasional vindications of his character and conduct, he was not, like some of them, helped along in his career, by a systematic course of newspaper panegyric. On the other hand, he encountered from opposing prints, an unusual degree of obloquy and reproach. At an early age, they selected him as a subject of perpetual and virulent abuse; and for nearly twenty years, this abuse was persisted in, to a degree rarely paralleled, and never surpassed, in the history of our politics. The disparagement of his abilities, and indeed the denial that he possessed any just claim to talents of any sort, was one of the most common, and perhaps the most provoking, of these libels. The slander was refuted by the daily exhibition of great parts, and malignity itself was obliged to admit, that he was always found adequate to the particular duty with which he had been charged; but this acknowledgement was uniformly followed by the prediction, that he had reached the “extremest verge” which destiny had assigned him; and that his next step would plunge him beyond his depth, not in a “sea of glory,” but in a “rude stream,” that should sweep away the past, and overwhelm him for the future. The story of his advancement—at once the most regular and rapid with which we are acquainted—is the best commentary on *diatribes* of this sort. We have seen his sphere of action constantly enlarging—from his native village to the county capital, from that to the metropolis of the state, and from the latter to the councils of the union—but we have found him equal, and more than equal, to every emergency, never falling short of his prior reputation, and never disappointing the hopes of his friends; on the contrary, each successive step in his career, whilst it has falsified the predictions of his enemies, has furnished new proofs of his capacity, and new claims to the respect and confidence of his countrymen.

In person, Mr. Van Buren is neither above nor below the middle height; his figure is erect and graceful—his frame slender, and apparently delicate, but capable of sustaining severe and long continued exertion—the general expression of his features, animated and

agreeable—his eye quick and piercing—his head, (which is now quite bald,) particularly his forehead, of unusual size, and admirable formation. The engraving by Hatch, which accompanies the memoir in the *CABINET*, from the fine portrait recently painted by Inman for the corporation of New-York, is a spirited and accurate likeness.

The private character of Mr. Van Buren may be commended without reserve. Enmity itself has rarely ever ventured to reproach or to suspect it. In his intercourse with the world, the justice, propriety, and benevolence of his conduct, render him a model for imitation; whilst the ease and frankness of his manners, and his happy talent for conversation, make him the ornament of the social circle. Blessed with a disposition at once firm, amiable, and forbearing; and uniting with a just self-respect, habitual self-control; he has been able amid the perplexities of litigation, the cares of office, and the contentions of party—to preserve the serenity of his temper, and to blend with a vigilant attention to his own character and rights, a constant observance of the courtesies of life and a sedulous regard to the feelings of others. No man ever numbered among his personal friends, a greater proportion of his political opponents. Even in times of the greatest excitement, those of them who enjoyed his acquaintance, always accorded him their respect—usually their confidence and esteem.

It is obvious that with such qualities and manners, he could hardly fail to secure the affections of his political associates. Such has accordingly been the case in every stage of his progress; and it is to this, combined with his admirable knowledge of men, and his practical good sense, that he is indebted for his success as a political leader. To this also must be ascribed the charge of intrigue and artifice, which has so often been preferred against him. If by this, it be intended, that he possesses in an eminent degree the talent of harmonizing, concentrating and directing the feelings and exertions of those with whom he acts—and that he has often exerted this talent with sagacity and effect—his friends must plead guilty to the charge. It would be as idle to deny it in respect to him, as to Hamilton or Jefferson, to Chatham or to Fox. But if by the charge, be intended, the pursuit of those objects which are held up by our free institutions, as the incentive, and the reward of honorable ambition, by trick duplicity or cunning—we may indignantly repel it, as alike unsupported by evidence and unfounded in fact. No man who was ever

brought in contact with him—who was able to speak to the point, from personal knowledge of his conduct—ever ventured to give to such an accusation the sanction of his name. On the contrary, all such persons will acknowledge—they must acknowledge, if they speak the truth—that his course as a politician, though decided and unyielding, was always open, liberal and honest. This has been admitted by several of his opponents, under circumstances peculiarly calculated to give force and solemnity to their statements. A single instance will illustrate this remark. The most violent warfare in which he was ever engaged, was that with Governor Clinton, and with his leading supporters, Chief Justice Spencer and the late William W. Van Ness, two of the ablest men New-York ever produced. Indeed with the latter of these gentlemen, he had waged a severe contest from his first connexion with political affairs. The character of these contests, the consequences that resulted from them, and their tendency to excite the most implacable hostility, are well known to all who are familiar with the history of New-York. They may also be guessed at by others, when we inform them that in the course of those conflicts, or some of them, Governor Clinton was twice driven into retirement—Chief Justice Spencer removed from office, and for some time kept from public employment—Judge Van Ness compelled to retire from the bench, and Mr. Van Buren twice removed from office, and for years proscribed and pursued with unrelenting severity. But each of these great men has borne testimony to the liberality, fairness and honor with which he had been treated by Mr. Van Buren, and to the general uprightness of his conduct as a man and a politician. Judge Van Ness did it on his death-bed; Governor Clinton, almost in the last moments of his life; and as to Chief Justice Spencer—with characteristic frankness, he often did it, even in the midst of our most violent collisions.

On this point, the friends of Mr. Van Buren may also triumphantly appeal to the whole American people. Within the last two years he has been arraigned before them, on the charge of having brought about, by a malign and interested agency, that difference between the highest officers of the government, and those dissensions in the cabinet, which occupied for a time, so large a share of public attention. These subjects have undergone, in the face of this nation, a scrutiny, the most ample and unsparing; and the too for the most part, during his absence from the

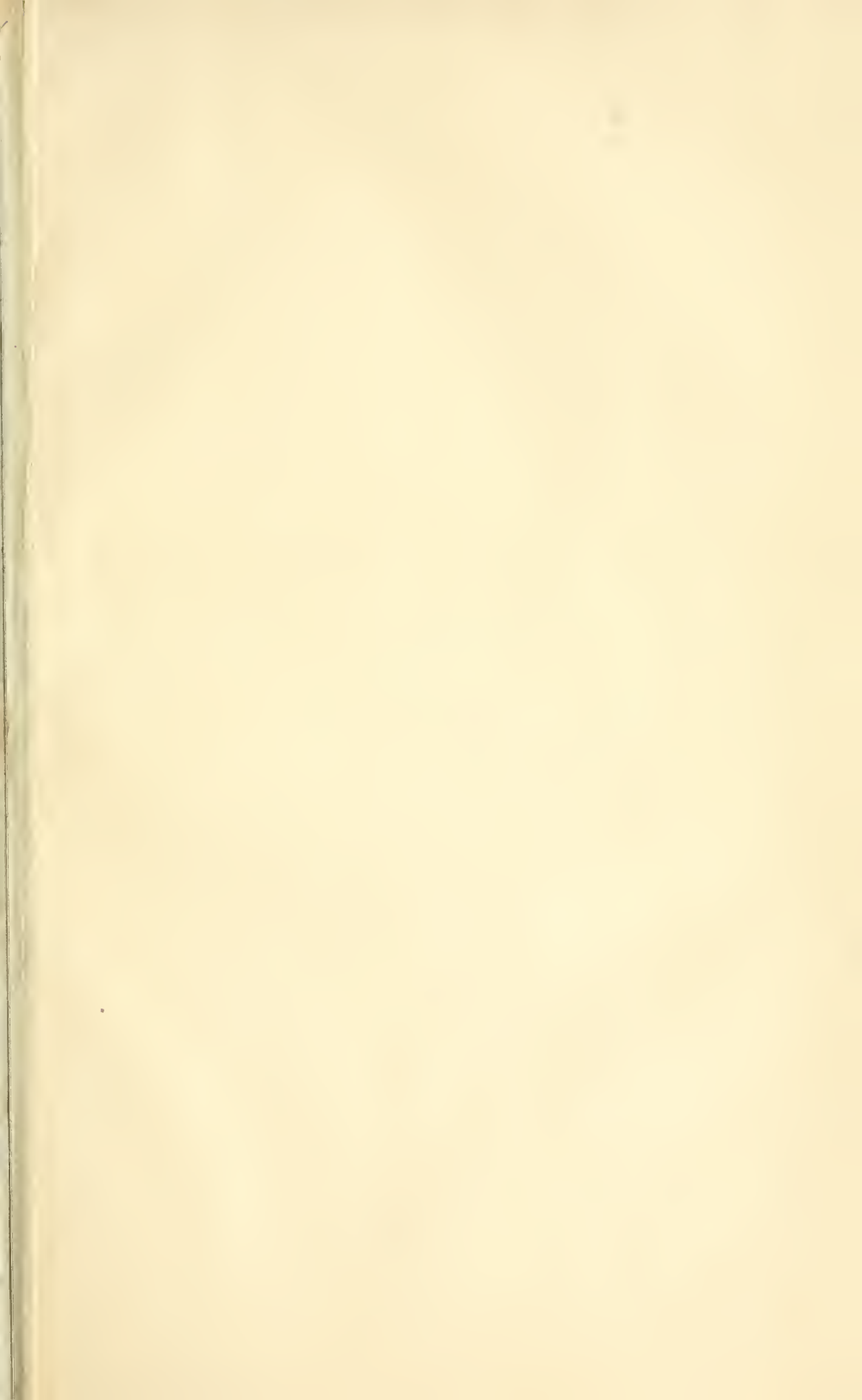
country. And yet the industry of his enemies has detected no single fact on which their malice can repose! On the other hand, we have the testimony of a witness who *must* know, and who is incapable of disguising or extenuating the truth—we have the testimony of ANDREW JACKSON—to the falsehood of the charge in all its parts and bearings. This is sufficient to put to flight a whole legion of inuendoes and suspicions.

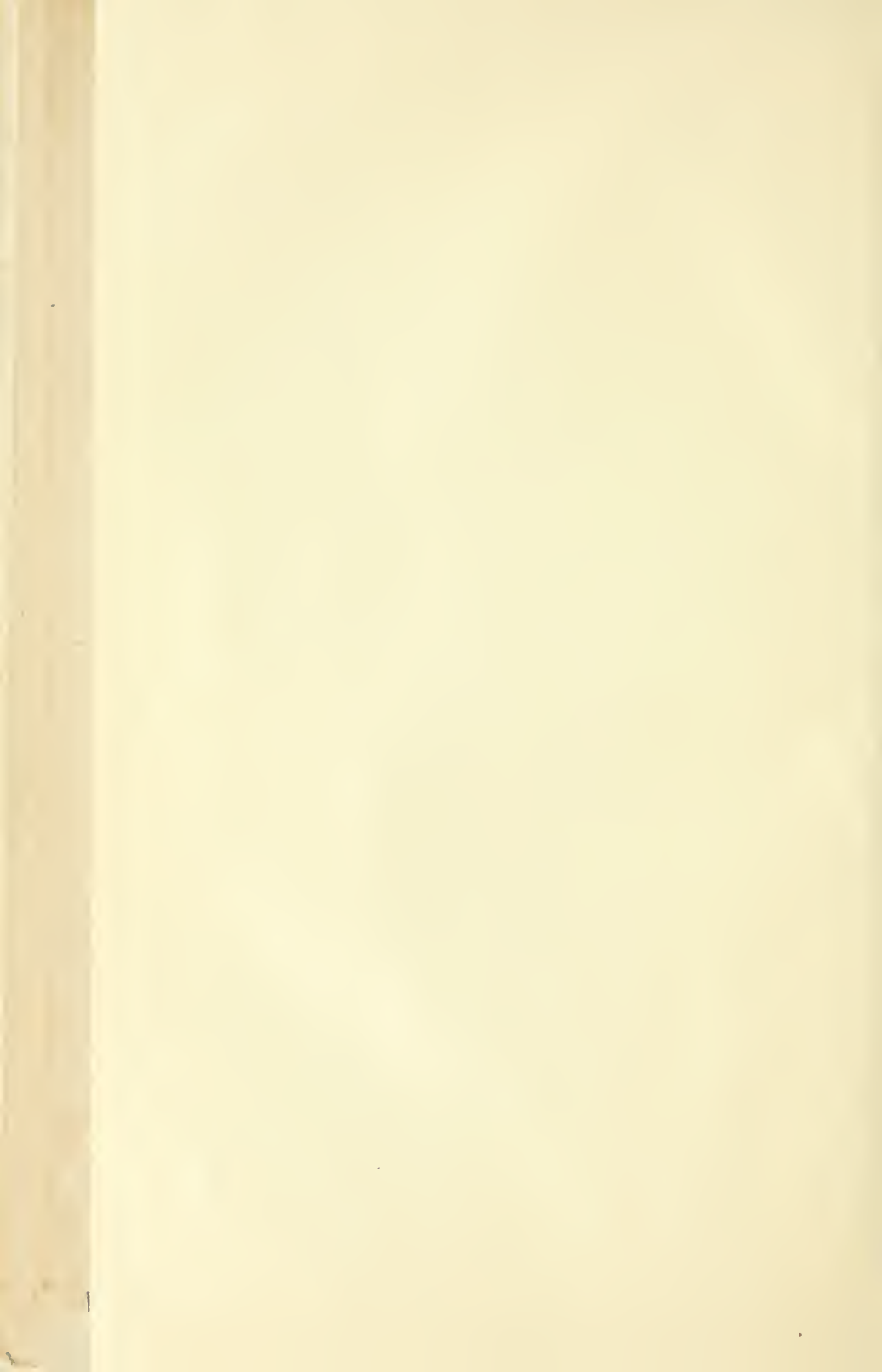
Such is the man who is now before the nation for the second office in their gift. We anticipate, with pleasure, his elevation to that honorable post, not from any personal interest in his success, or in that of the candidate with whom he is associated, but because we know him to be “honest, capable and faithful to the constitution;”—because we believe that the best interests of the country will be promoted by his election;—and above all, because that election will furnish a new and most impressive illustration of the great moral and political truth, that integrity, though it may sometimes be beaten down by unna-

tural coalitions, will yet ultimately receive, at the hands of a free and intelligent community, a full and triumphant vindication. The influence of such a vindication, will not, in the present case, be confined to our own country, nor to the present generation. It will attract the notice of other nations; it will go down to remote posterity. With the former, it will redeem us from the reproach incurred by the wrong intended to be redressed; with the latter, it will form a page of authentic history, from which envious and aspiring men may read the salutary lesson—one which from the days of Haman to the present hour, they have been slow to learn—that when truth and justice are violated to effect the ruin of an adversary, the very contrivances adopted to accomplish this end, are likely to become the means of his advancement; and that it is therefore the part, not only of duty, but of interest, to treat their opponents with justice and moderation, and “to do unto others as they would have others do to them.”

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